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Kanno et al.

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(54) **CONVEYOR AND CONVEYING METHOD**

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H01M 10/0525 (2010.01)

H01M 10/0587 (2010.01)

H01M 10/04 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **B65G 35/04** (2013.01); **H01M 10/0409**
(2013.01); **H01M 10/0525** (2013.01); **H01M**
10/0587 (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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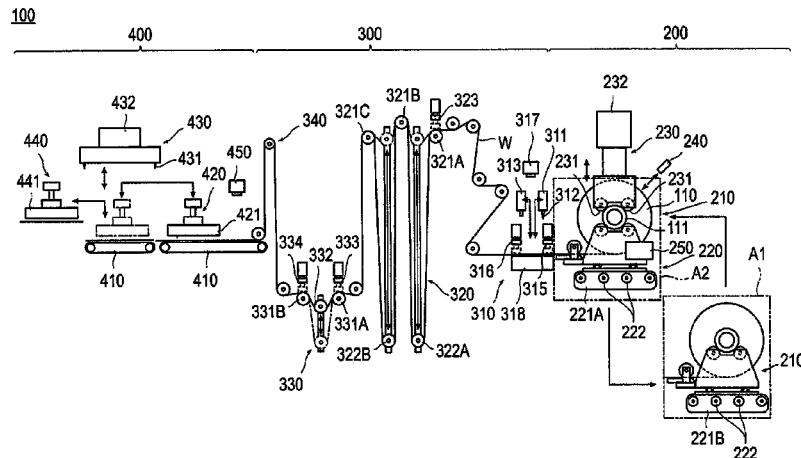
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A conveyor is provided with a supply roll, a plurality of movement parts and a first securing device. The supply roll is rotatably arranged and is configured to support a belt-shaped cell material for an electrode or a separator to intermittently feeding out the cell material by rotation of the supply roll. The movement parts are configured to lengthen and shorten a conveying route by conveyably holding the cell material fed out from the supply roll. The first securing device is configured to secure the cell material. The first securing device is provided upstream from the movement parts along a direction in which the cell material is conveyed. The movement parts are further configured to change position so as to shorten the conveying route in a state in which the cell material is secured by the first securing device.

12 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



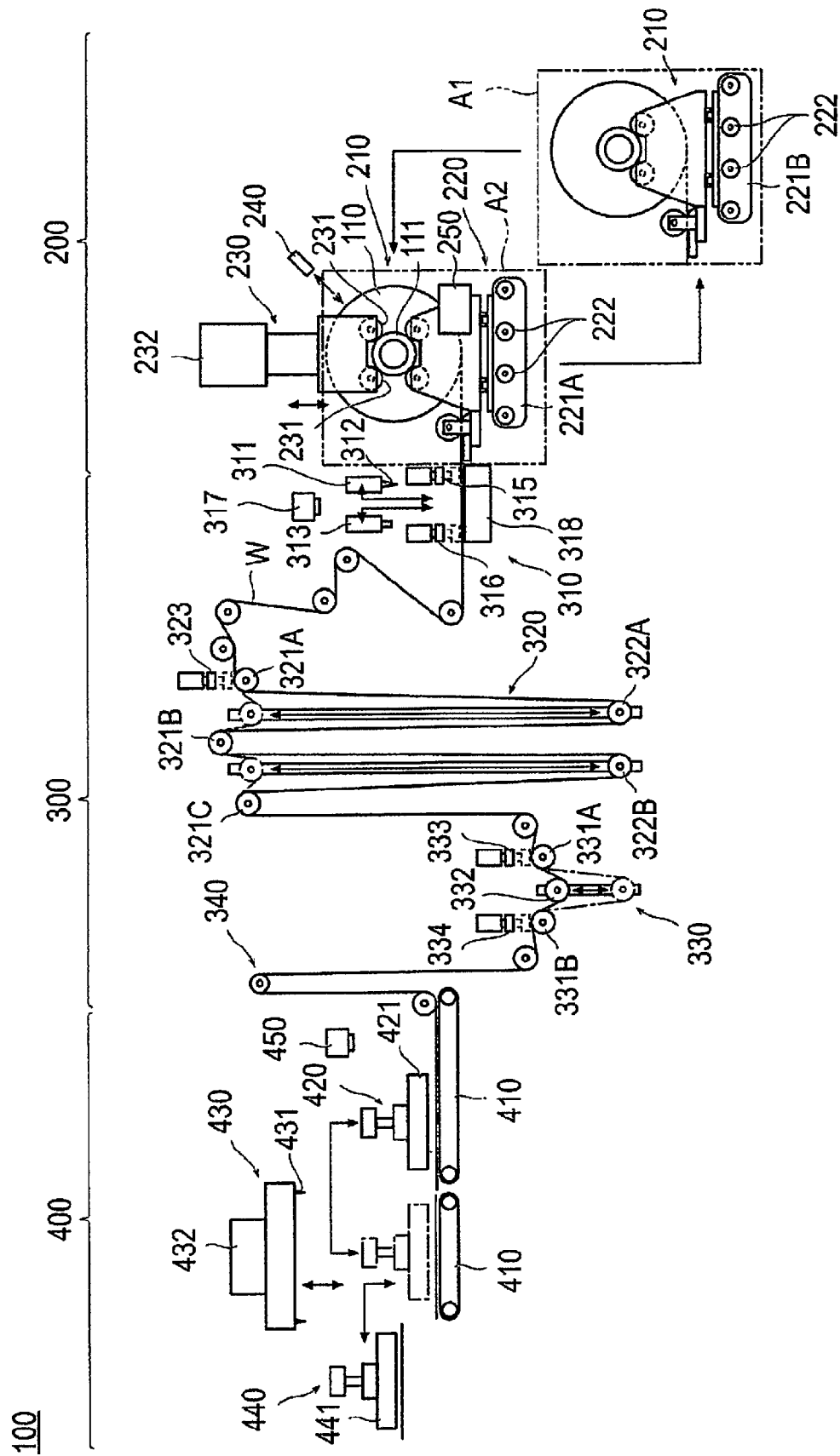


FIG. 1

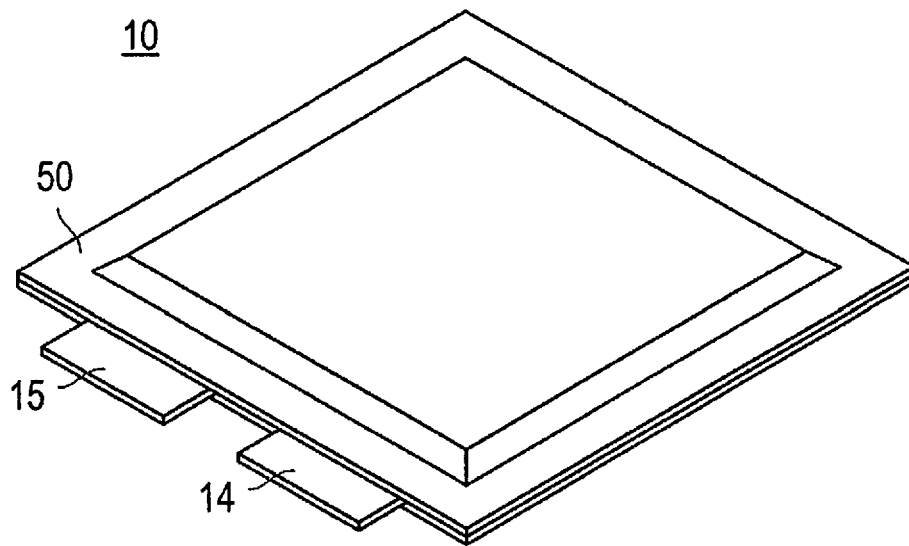


FIG. 2

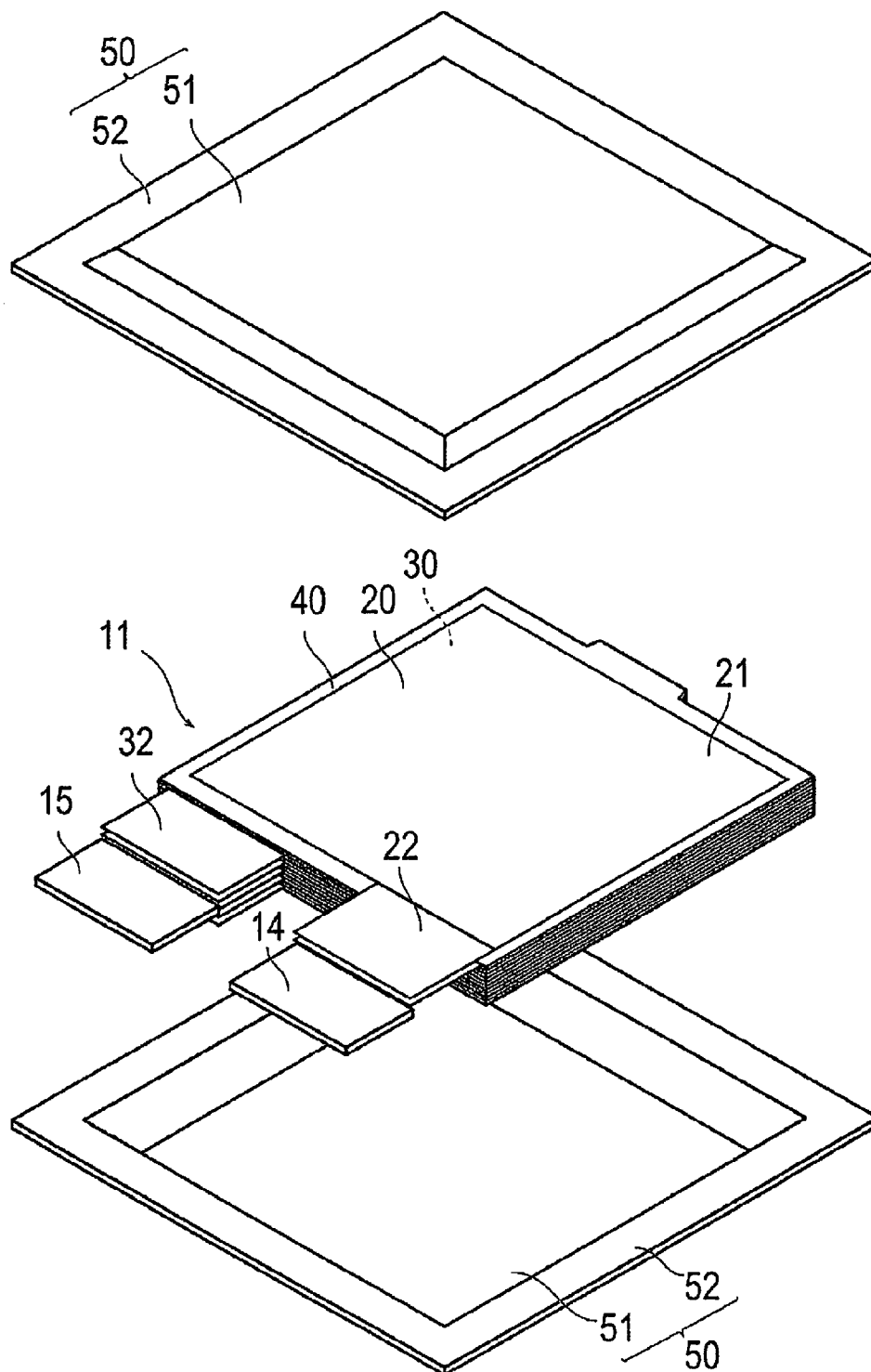


FIG. 3

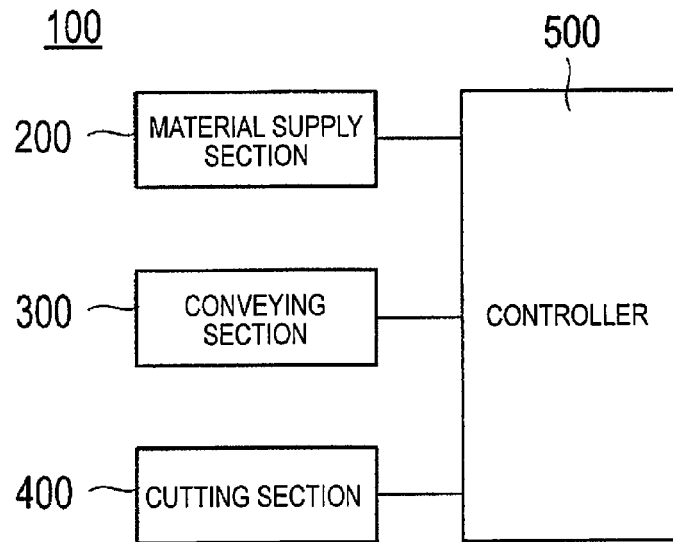


FIG. 4

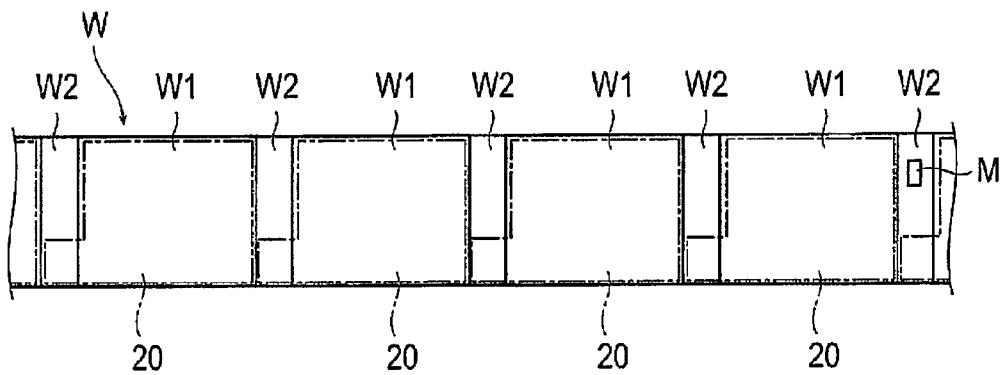


FIG. 5

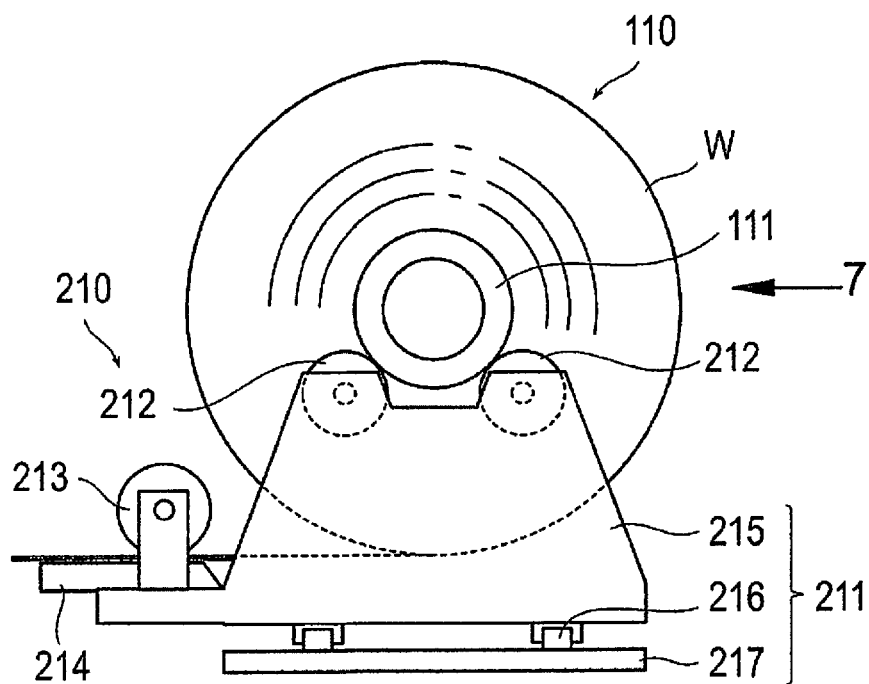


FIG. 6

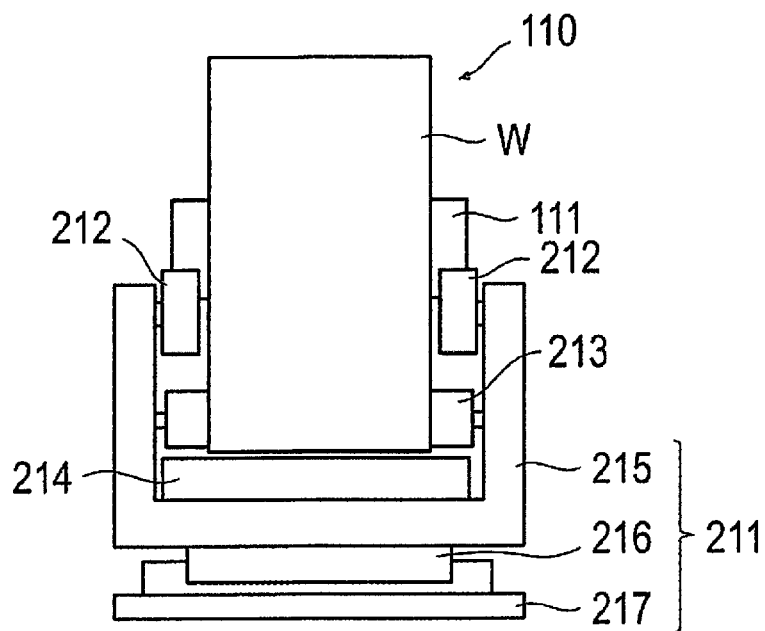


FIG. 7

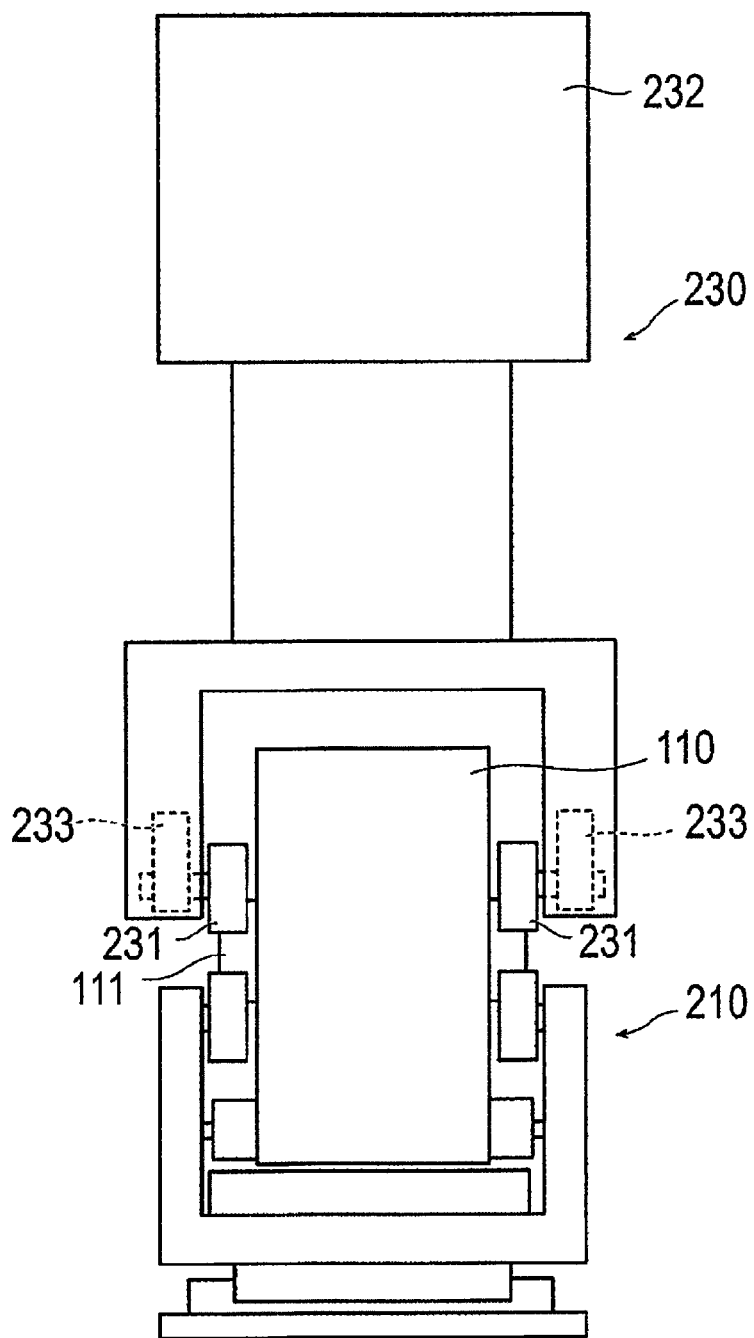


FIG. 8

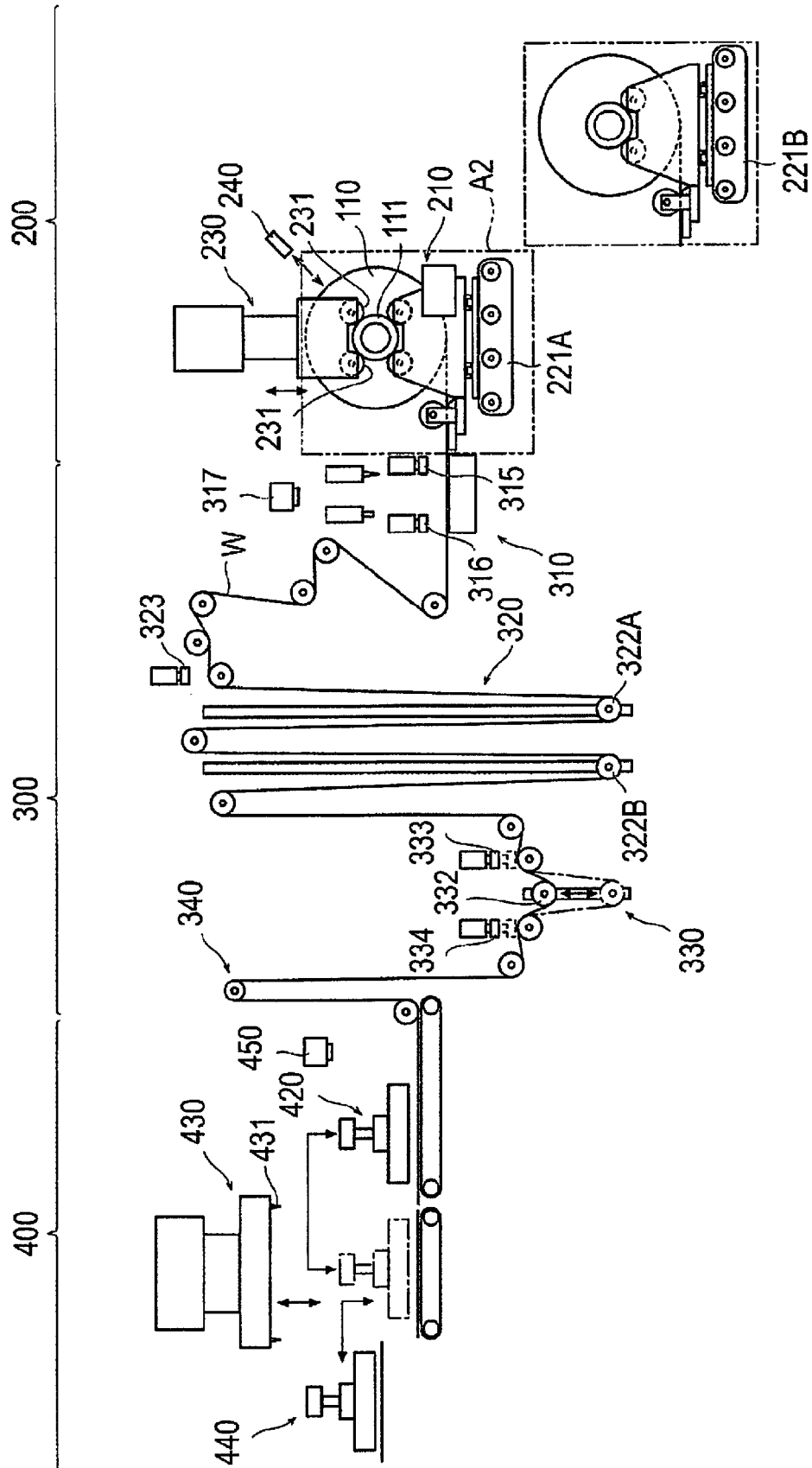


FIG. 9

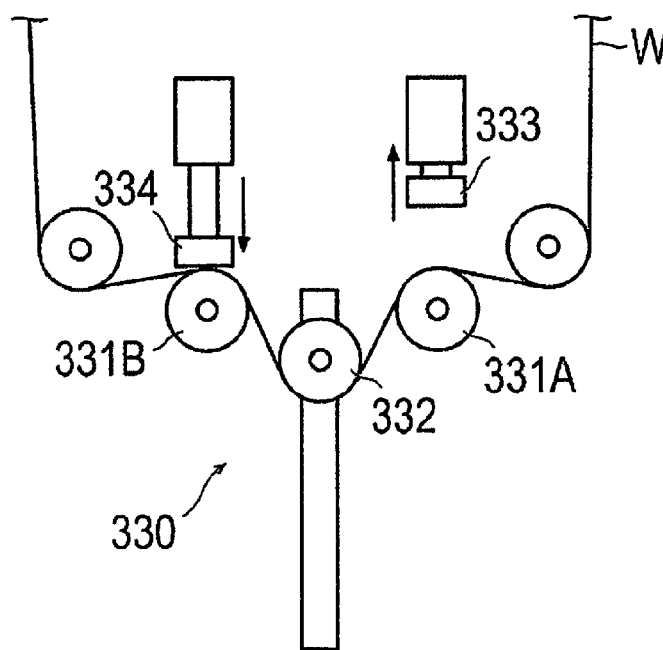


FIG. 10

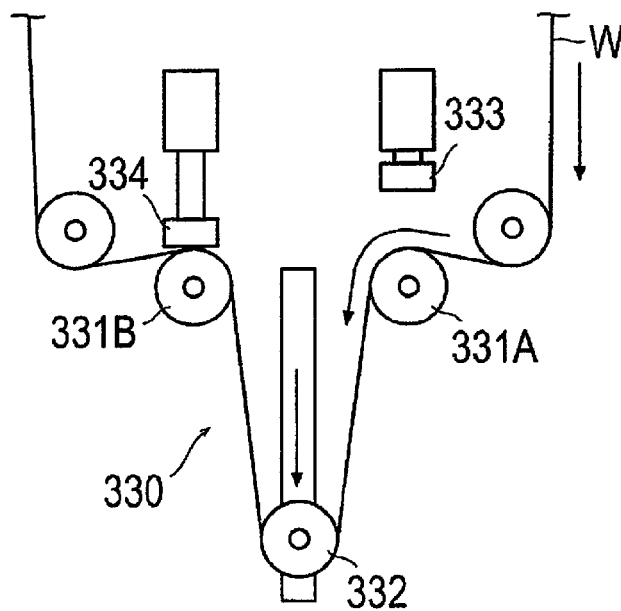


FIG. 11

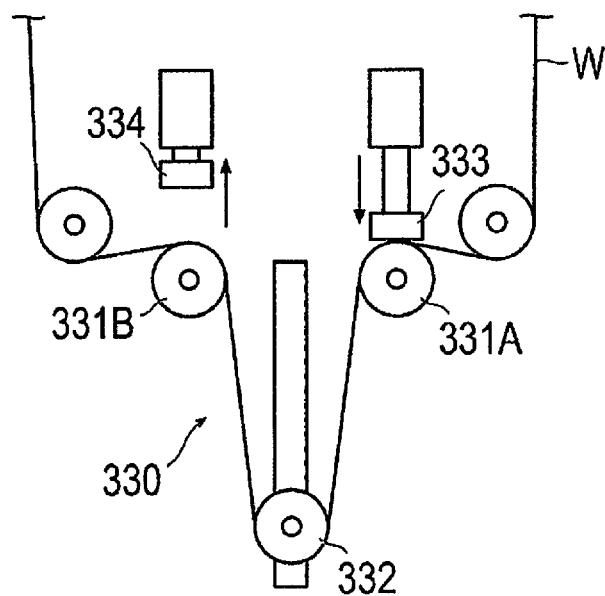


FIG. 12

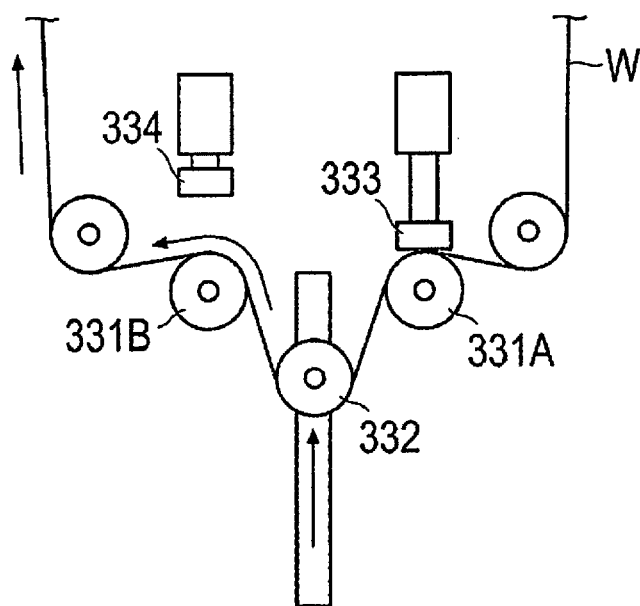


FIG. 13

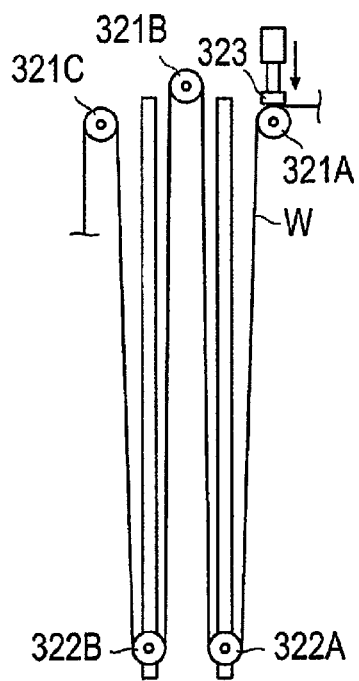


FIG. 14

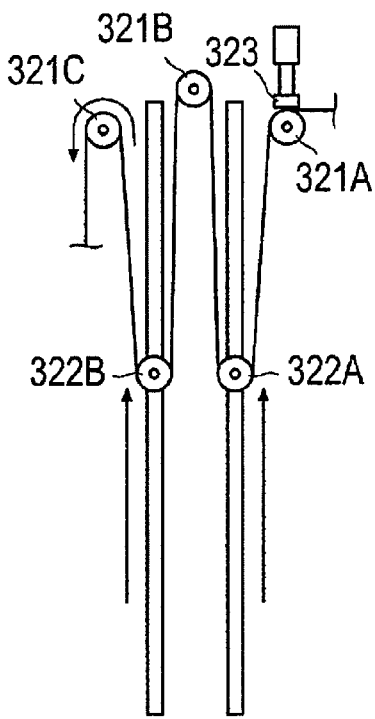


FIG. 15

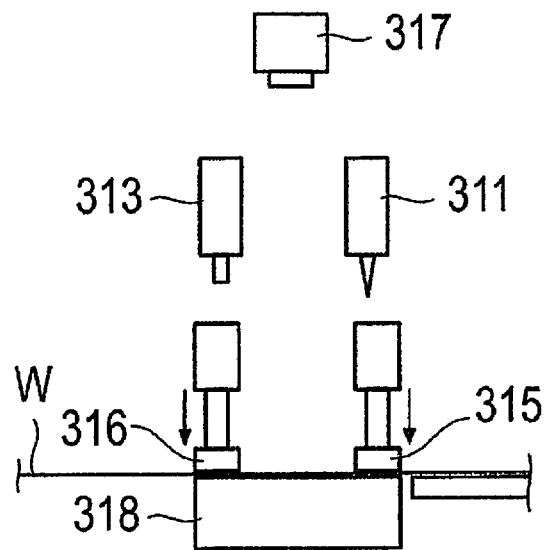


FIG. 16

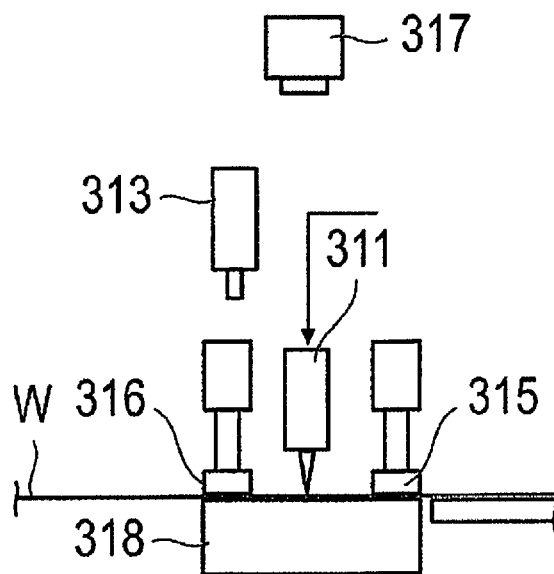


FIG. 17

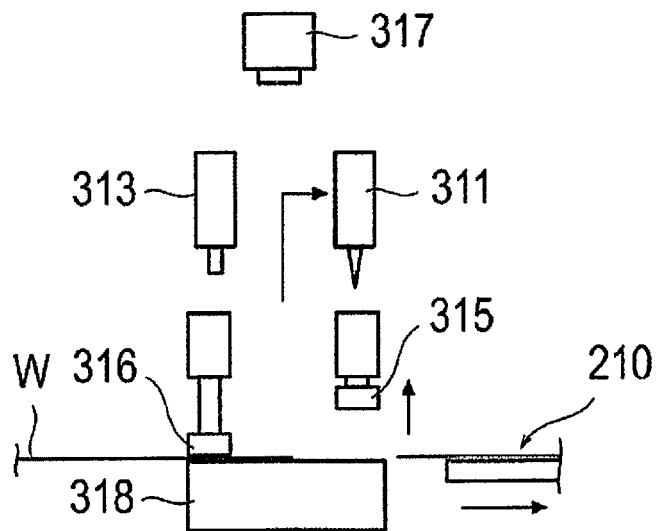


FIG. 18

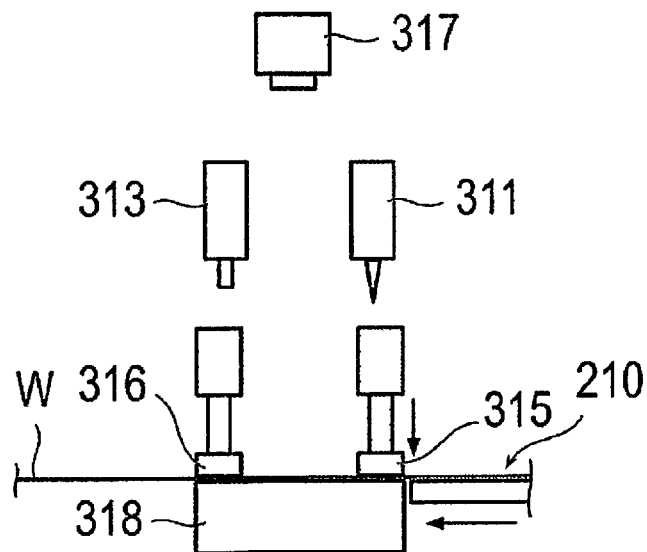


FIG. 19

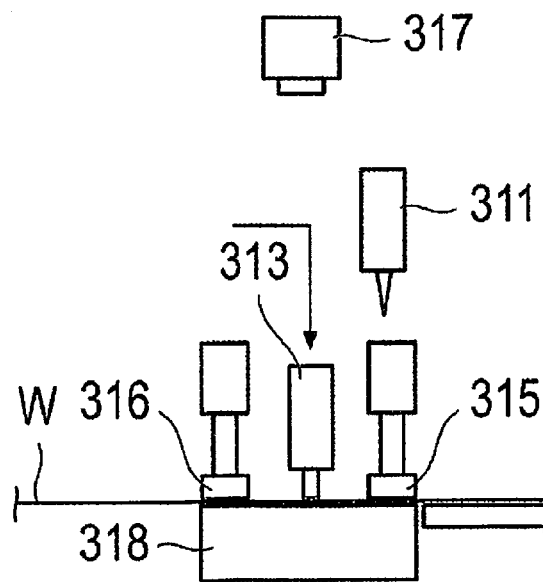


FIG. 20

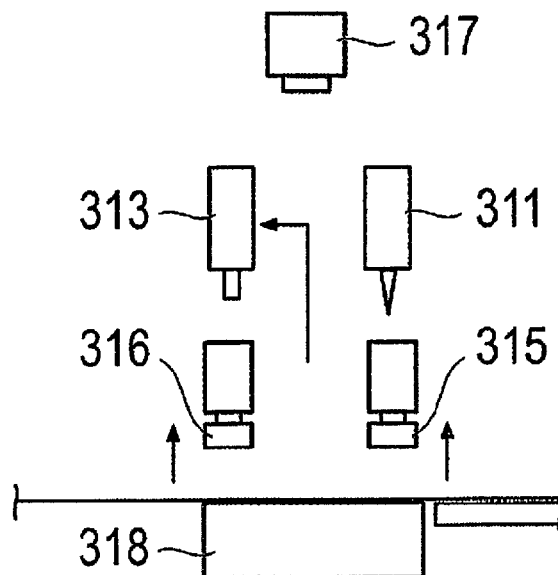


FIG. 21

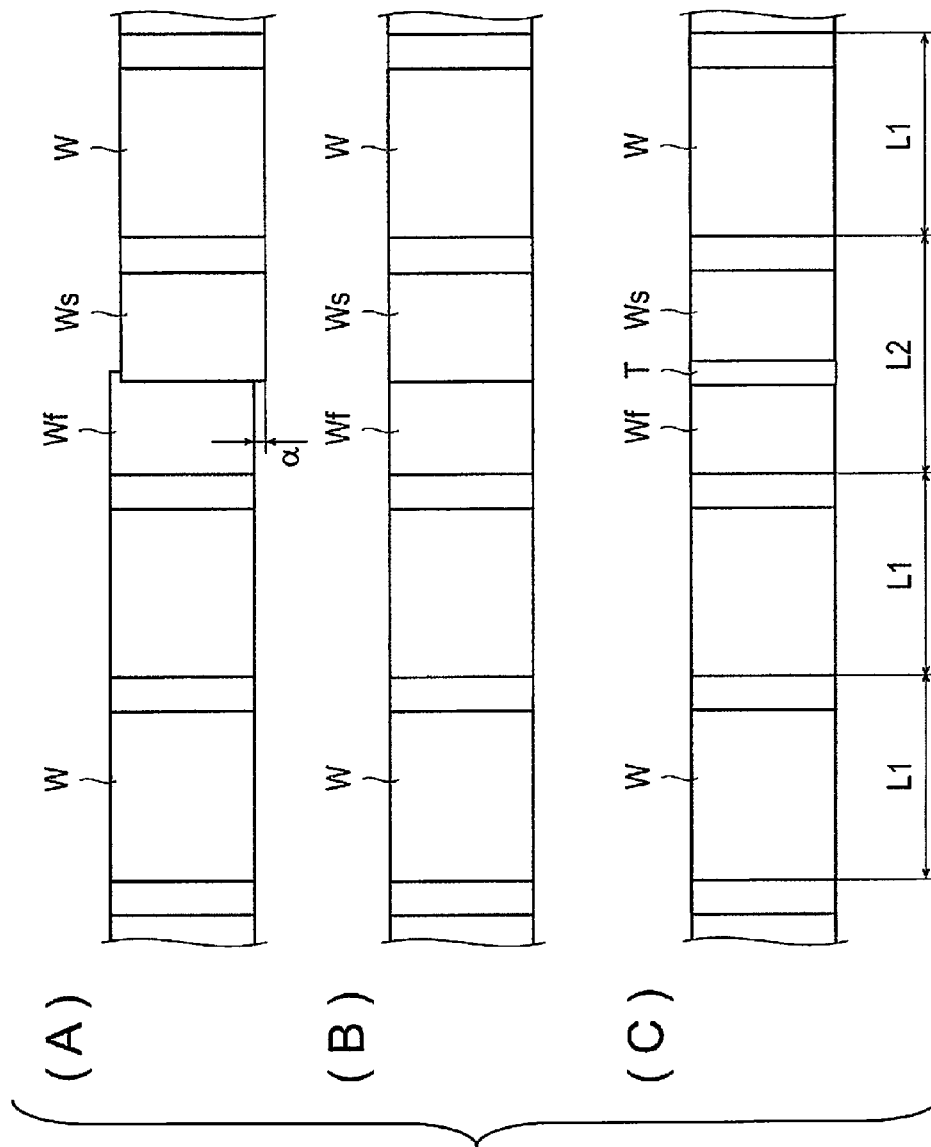


FIG. 22

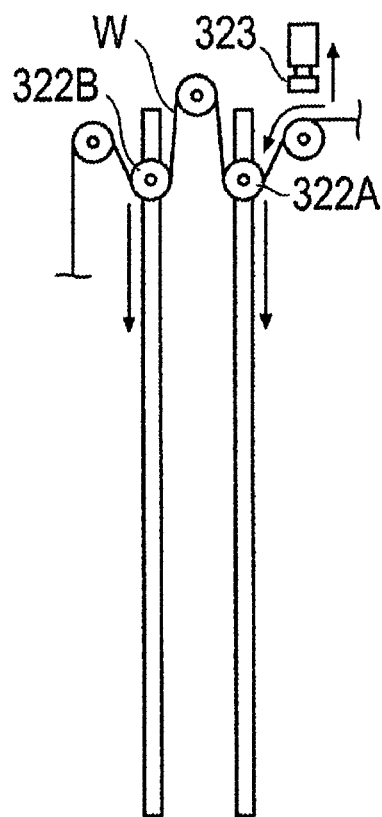


FIG. 23

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CONVEYOR AND CONVEYING METHOD**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a U.S. National stage of International Application No. PCT/JP2013/053376, filed Feb. 13, 2013. This application claims priority to Japanese Patent Application No. 2012-028374, filed on Feb. 13, 2012. The entire disclosure of Japanese Patent Application No. 2012-028374 is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND**1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to a conveyor and a conveying method for conveying a belt-shaped cell material that is a material from which electrodes or separators are cut out.

2. Background Information

Recent cells comprise an electrode assembly wherein multiple positive electrodes and negative electrodes as electrodes are superposed together with separators in between. As a method for manufacturing the electrode assembly of such a cell, Patent Japanese Laid-Open Patent Application No. 2009-256052, for example, discloses a method for manufacturing a roll-shaped electrode assembly by superposing a belt-shaped cell material, which is the material for the electrodes and the separators, and winding the cell material around a winding shaft while the cell material is drawn out from a supply roll on which the cell material has been wound.

SUMMARY

In the method disclosed in Japanese Laid-Open Patent Application No. 2009-256052, when there is no longer any cell material or a small amount of the cell material on the supply roll, the equipment must be temporarily stopped and the supply roll must be replaced with a new roll. However, production does not proceed while the equipment is stopped, and productivity declines.

The present invention was devised in order to resolve the problems described above, it being an object of the invention to provide a conveyor and a conveying method that can improve productivity without the need to stop the equipment when the supply roll is replaced.

The conveyor of the present invention comprises: movement parts capable of lengthening and shortening a conveying route by conveyably holding a belt-shaped cell material fed out from a supply roll and changing position, the cell material being a material for an electrode or separator, and the cell material being wound around the supply roll; and first securing means capable of securing the cell material, the first securing means being provided upstream from the movement parts along the direction in which the cell material is conveyed. The movement parts change position so as to shorten the conveying route in a state in which the cell material is secured by the first securing means.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Referring now to the attached drawings which form a part of this original disclosure.

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram showing a conveyor according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view showing a flat cell.

FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view showing the flat cell.

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FIG. 4 is a schematic configuration diagram showing the conveyor according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 5 is a plan view showing the cell material.

FIG. 6 is a plan view showing a roll support base for supporting the supply roll.

FIG. 7 is a plan view showing the roll support base observed from the direction of line 7 in FIG. 6.

FIG. 8 is a plan view showing the roll support base supporting the supply roll and the brake force applying means.

FIG. 9 is a plan view for describing the action of the conveyor according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 10 is a plan view showing immediately before the cell material is drawn out from the upstream side by the draw-out section.

FIG. 11 is a plan view showing when the cell material is being drawn out from the upstream side by the draw-out section.

FIG. 12 is a plan view showing immediately before the cell material is conveyed to the downstream side by the draw-out section.

FIG. 13 is a plan view showing when the cell material is being conveyed to the downstream side by the draw-out section.

FIG. 14 is a plan view showing when the cell material is fixed in place by a buffer section clamp.

FIG. 15 is a plan view showing when the cell material is supplied to the downstream side from the buffer section.

FIG. 16 is a plan view showing when the cell material is fixed in place in order for an automatic joining section to perform automatic joining.

FIG. 17 is a plan view showing when the cell material is cut in the automatic joining section.

FIG. 18 is a plan view of the automatic joining section showing when the previous supply roll is conveyed out.

FIG. 19 is a plan view of the automatic joining section showing when a new supply roll is conveyed in.

FIG. 20 is a plan view showing when cell materials are joined together in the automatic joining section.

FIG. 21 is a plan view showing when joining is complete in the automatic joining section.

FIG. 22 are plan views showing previous cell material and new cell material, (A) showing a cell material before joining is performed, (B) showing a cell material when the position is corrected, and (C) showing a cell material after joining has been performed.

FIG. 23 is a plan view showing when the fixing in place of the cell material by the buffer section clamp is released.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

An embodiment of the present invention is described below with reference to the accompanying drawings. In the description of the drawings, the same elements are denoted by the same symbols, and redundant descriptions are omitted. Dimensional ratios in the drawings are exaggerated for the sake of the descriptions and are different from the actual ratios.

A conveyor **100** according to the present embodiment is an apparatus for cutting out electrodes from a belt-shape cell material **W**, which is a material for electrodes or separators constituting batteries, while the cell material **W** is conveyed by being drawn out from a supply roll **110** on which the cell material is wound, as shown in FIG. 1.

(Cell)

First, the cell **10** will be described with reference to FIGS. 2 and 3.

The cell **10** is a flat lithium ion secondary cell, for example, in which a stacked electrode assembly **11** is stored together with an electrolytic solution inside an exterior member **50**, as shown in FIGS. **2** and **3**. The cell **10** has a positive electrode lead **14** and a negative electrode lead **15** led to the exterior out of the exterior member **50**.

The stacked electrode assembly **11** is formed by sequentially stacking a positive electrode **20**, a negative electrode **30**, and a separator **40**. The positive electrode **20** has a positive electrode active material layer composed of a lithium-transition metal complex oxide such as LiMn_2O_4 , for example. The negative electrode **30** has a negative electrode active material layer composed of carbon and a lithium-transition metal complex oxide, for example. The separator **40** is formed from porous polyethylene (PE) that is breathable enough for electrolytes to permeate, for example.

The positive electrode **20** is formed into a substantially rectangular shape, and is made by forming positive electrode active material layers **21** on both sides of an extremely thin sheet-shaped positive electrode current collector. In the positive electrode **20**, a positive electrode tab **22** connected to the positive electrode lead **14** is formed in the end without coating the positive electrode current collector with the positive electrode active material.

The negative electrode **30** is formed into a substantially rectangular shape, and is made by forming negative electrode active material layers on both sides of an extremely thin sheet-shaped negative electrode current collector. In the negative electrode **30**, a negative electrode tab **32** connected to the negative electrode lead **15** is formed in the end without coating the negative electrode current collector with the negative electrode active material.

In terms of reducing weight and heat conductivity, the exterior member **50** is made of a sheet material such as a polymer-metal composite laminate film of aluminum, stainless steel, nickel, copper, or another metal (including alloys) coated with an insulator such as a polypropylene film. The exterior member **50** has a main body part **51** covering the stacked electrode assembly **11** and an outer peripheral part **52** extending from the peripheral edge of the main body part **51**, and part or all of the outer peripheral part **52** is bonded by heat fusion.

(Conveyor)

Next, the conveyor **100** according to the present embodiment is described. In the present embodiment, the description is given using the positive electrode **20** as the element that is cut out, but the description applies also to the cutting out of the negative electrode **30** or the separator **40**.

The conveyor **100** comprises a material supply section **200** for supplying a belt-shaped cell material W, which is the material of the positive electrode **20**, from the supply roll **110** around which the cell material W is wound, and a conveying section **300** for conveying the supplied cell material W while the cell material is folded back by a plurality of rollers, as shown in FIGS. **1** and **4**. The conveyor **100** further comprises a cutting section **400** for cutting electrodes from the fed cell material W and conveying the electrodes, and a controller **500** (control means) for collectively controlling the entire conveyor **100**.

The material supply section **200** comprises a roll support base **210** for rotatably holding the supply roll **110**, a support base movement mechanism **220** for automatically moving the roll support base **210** toward or away from the conveying section **300**, and brake force applying means **230** for applying brake force to the rotation of the supply roll **110**. The material supply section **200** further comprises roll detection means **240** for measuring the thickness of the cell material W wound

around the supply roll **110**, and roll position correction means **250** for correcting the position of the supply roll **110**.

The supply roll **110** is formed by winding a fixed width of cell material W around a cylindrical core **111**, the cell material being narrower in width than the core **111**. The cell material W in the present embodiment, which is used for a positive electrode, contains an alternating arrangement of active material parts W1 which are electroconductive members as positive electrode current collectors coated with a positive electrode active material, and tab parts W2 which are not coated with a positive electrode active material, as shown in FIG. **5**. Positive electrodes **20** are cut out from the cell material W as shown by the single-dash lines in FIG. **5**, whereby part of each active material part W1 constitutes a positive electrode active material layer **21**, and part of each tab part W2 constitutes a positive electrode tab **22**. From the ending edge (the edge positioned on the inner peripheral side of the supply roll **110**) of the cell material W, slightly toward the starting edge (the outer periphery of the supply roll **110**), an ending edge mark M is provided for indicating that the ending edge is near when the cell material W is sequentially drawn out from the outer periphery. The ending edge mark M is formed by a through-hole or the like, for example.

The roll support base **210** comprises a support base main body part **211** constituting a frame, holding rollers **212** for rotatably holding the core **111**, and a rotating roller **213** and a holding plate **214** in contact with the cell material W drawn out from the supply roll **110**, as shown in FIGS. **6** and **7**.

The support base main body part **211** comprises an upper support part **215** constituting a frame for holding the supply roll **110**, a bottom base **216** provided to the bottom edge, and a linear guide **217** for moveably supporting the support base main body part **211** relative to the bottom base **216**. The upper support part **215** is disposed in the upper part of the bottom base **216** via the linear guide **217**, and thereby can move along the axial direction of the supply roll **110**.

The holding rollers **212**, which correspond to the respective ends of the core **111** of the supply roll **110**, are aligned in twos to be substantially horizontal, apart from each other at a gap that is smaller than the diameter of the core **111**, and are able to rotate freely relative to the upper support part **215**. Therefore, the supply roll **110** can be rotatably supported by disposing the core **111** above and between two holding rollers **212** aligned substantially horizontally.

The rotating roller **213** is rotatably attached to the upper support part **215**, and the cell material W drawn out from the supply roll **110** is held at a fixed height between the rotating roller and the holding plate **214** which is fixed to the upper support part **215**.

The support base movement mechanism **220** comprises two moving bases **221A**, **221B** capable of moving up and down as well as moving horizontally as shown in FIG. **1**, and movement mechanisms (not shown) for moving the moving bases **221A**, **221B** up and down as well as horizontally.

The roll support base **210** can be placed on both the moving bases **221A**, **221B**, the roll support base **210** placed at a convey in/out position A1 can be conveyed to a connecting position A2 adjacent to the conveying section **300**, and the roll support base **210** can be conveyed from the connecting position A2 to the convey in/out position A1. The moving bases **221A**, **221B** comprise a plurality of support base movement rollers **222** that enable the roll support base **210** to move horizontally in order to make it easier to convey the roll support base **210** in and out. Both the moving bases **221A**, **221B** are capable of moving individually, and an old supply roll **110** from which the cell material W has been used up can

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be conveyed out by one moving base **221A**, while a new supply roll **110** can be conveyed in by the other moving base **221B**.

The brake force applying means **230** is disposed above the roll support base **210**, which is disposed in the connecting position A2, as shown in FIGS. **1** and **8**. The brake force applying means **230** comprises braking rollers **231** capable of moving toward and away from both axial-direction ends of the core **111** of the supply roll **110** being supported on the roll support base **210**, and a roller movement mechanism **232** for raising and lowering the braking rollers **231**. The braking rollers **231** are connected to a braking mechanism **233** such as a brake capable of adjusting rotational load, and the rotational load is adjusted by the controller **500**. The braking mechanism **233** can be a mechanical mechanism that reduces speed by converting kinetic energy into heat energy by friction, a mechanism that uses the electrical power of an electric motor or the like, or a mechanism that uses the motion resistance of a fluid, for example, but the braking mechanism is not particularly limited as long as the brake force can be controlled.

The roll detection means **240** is a laser displacement gauge disposed on the radial-direction outer side of the supply roll **110**, facing the area where the cell material W is wound on the supply roll **110** supported on the roll support base **210** disposed in the connecting position A2, as shown in FIG. **1**. The roll detection means **240** detects the distance to the supply roll **110** and transmits a detected signal to the controller **500**. From the detected signal, the controller **500** can calculate the remaining amount of the cell material W on the supply roll **110**. The roll detection means **240** is not limited to a laser displacement gauge as long as it can specify the remaining amount of the cell material W in the supply roll **110**, and may be a displacement gauge that uses means other than a laser, a weight scale, or an image device such as a camera, for example.

The roll position correction means **250** comprises a drive source such as a motor or a cylinder. Controlled by the controller **500**, the roll position correction means **250** pushes on and moves the upper support part **215** in a horizontal direction orthogonal to the conveying direction, the upper support part being moveably supported by the linear guide **217** of the roll support base **210**.

The conveying section **300** comprises an automatic joining section **310** for joining another new cell material W to the already conveyed cell material W, a buffer section **320** capable of lengthening and shortening the conveyed route of the cell material W, and a draw-out section **330** for intermittently drawing out fixed lengths of the cell material W. Furthermore, the conveying section **300** comprises a corrective roller **340** for correcting bending in the cell material W.

The automatic joining section **310** is provided so as to be capable of linking with the roll support base **210** on the moving bases **221A**, **221B**. The automatic joining section **310** has the function of automatically joining the end edge Wf of a pre-replacement cell material W with the starting edge Ws of a post-replacement cell material W, when the cell material W of the supply roll **110** is at an end a new supply roll **110** is to be replaced, as shown in FIG. **22(A)**. The action of the automatic joining section **310** is controlled by the controller **500**.

The automatic joining section **310** comprises a cutting part **311** for cutting the cell material W, a bonding part **313** for bonding cell materials W together, a joining section first clamp **315**, a joining section second clamp **316**, a first imaging part **317** (detection means), and a receiving part **318** for supporting the cell material W from below, as shown in FIG. **1**.

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The cutting part **311** comprises a sharp cutting blade **312** that can move toward or away from the cell material W from above, and that cuts the cell material W by moving toward.

The bonding part **313** comprises a tape-affixing mechanism **314** that can move toward and away from the cell material W from above, and that affixes tape T coated on one side with a bonding agent (an adhesive) between the ending edge Wf of the previous cell material W and the starting edge Ws of the next cell material W. The tape-affixing mechanism **314** is a mechanism that presses and affixes the tape T while sequentially drawing out the tape from the roll on which the tape T is wound, for example. The configuration of the bonding part **313** is not limited as long as it is capable of bonding cell materials W together.

The joining section first clamp **315**, which is disposed upstream of the cutting part **311** and the bonding part **313** and which is capable of moving toward and away from the cell material W from above, can sandwich and fix the cell material W with the receiving part **318** below.

The joining section second clamp **316**, which is disposed downstream of the cutting part **311** and the bonding part **313** and which is capable of moving toward and away from the cell material W from above, can sandwich and fix the cell material W with the receiving part **318** below.

The first imaging part **317** is provided so as to be capable of observing the cell material W from above, and is capable of transmitting captured images to the controller **500**. In an image captured by the first imaging part **317**, the ending edge mark M of the cell material W is distinguished and used in order to specify the replacement time of the supply roll **110**. Furthermore, the image captured by the first imaging part **317** is used in order to specify misalignment α (see FIG. **22(A)**) of the starting edge Ws of the post-replacement cell material W, in the width direction relative to the ending edge Wf of the pre-replacement cell material W, when the supply roll **110** is being exchanged. The specified misalignment α is used as the amount by which the supply roll **110** is corrected by the roll position correction means **250**.

The buffer section **320** comprises securing rollers **321A**, **321B**, **321C** which are rotatably provided to secured positions and which hold the cell material W so as to allow the cell material to be conveyed, and rotatable buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** (movement parts) which are provided to be capable of moving and which hold the cell material W so as to allow the cell material to be conveyed. The buffer section further **320** comprises a buffer section clamp **323** (first securing means) for holding the cell material W.

The three fixing rollers **321A**, **321B**, **321C** are disposed in substantially horizontal alignment, and the two buffer rollers **322A**, **322B**, which are capable of simultaneously moving up and down, are disposed so as to be positioned alternately between the three fixing rollers **321A**, **321B**, **321C**. The buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** can be moved up and down by a raising/lowering mechanism driven by a motor, a cylinder, or the like, and the movement is controlled by the controller **500**. When the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** are lowered, the conveying route is lengthened, and when the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** are raised, the conveying route is shortened.

The buffer section clamp **323** is provided so as to be capable of moving toward and away from the upstream fixing roller **321A**, and the cell material W can be sandwiched and fixed between the buffer section clamp and the fixing roller **321A**.

The buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** are usually positioned at the lower end, and when the supply roll **110** is replaced, the buffer rollers move upward in a state in which the cell material W is held between the buffer section clamp **323** and the fixing

roller **321A** and the supply of the cell material **W** from upstream is stopped. The conveying route is thereby shortened, the shortened section of cell material **W** can be fed downstream, and the supply roll **110** can be replaced on the upstream side without stopping the cutting of the cell material **W** on the downstream side.

The draw-out section **330** comprises two fixing rollers **331A**, **331B** which are provided so as to be capable of rotating in fixed positions and which hold the cell material **W** so as to allow the cell material to be conveyed, and one draw-out roller **332** (draw-out means) which is provided so as to be capable of moving and rotating and which holds the cell material **W** so as to allow the cell material to be conveyed. Furthermore, the draw-out section **330** comprises a draw-out section first clamp **333** and a draw-out section second clamp **334** for holding the cell material **W**.

The fixing rollers **331A**, **331B** are disposed in horizontal alignment, and the one draw-out roller **332** capable of moving up and down is disposed so as to be positioned between the two fixing rollers **331A**, **331B**. The draw-out roller **332** is capable of being moved up and down by a raising/lowering mechanism driven by a motor, a cylinder, or the like, and the movement is controlled by the controller **500**. When the draw-out roller **332** is lowered, the conveying route is lengthened, and when the draw-out roller **332** is raised, the conveying route is shortened.

The draw-out section first clamp **333**, which is provided so as to be capable of moving toward and away from the upstream fixing roller **331A**, can sandwich and fix the cell material **W** with the fixing roller **331A**. The draw-out section second clamp **334**, which is provided so as to be capable of moving toward and away from the downstream fixing roller **331B**, can sandwich and fix the cell material **W** with the fixing roller **331B**.

The draw-out section **330** can intermittently draw out fixed lengths of the cell material **W** from the supply roll **110**, by interlocking the draw-out roller **332**, the draw-out section first clamp **333**, and the draw-out section second clamp **334**.

The corrective roller **340**, which is a rotatable roller for holding the cell material **W** so as to allow the cell material to be conveyed, has the function of correcting winding creases in the cell material **W** which has bent due to being wound on the supply roll **110**. The corrective roller **340** conveys the cell material **W** while bending the convex shapes of the creases into concave shapes, by being in contact with the surface of the cell material that constitutes the outer peripheral surface when the cell material is wound on the supply roll **110**, i.e. the surface in which the creases are convex. The outside diameter of the corrective roller **340** is formed smaller than the outside diameters of other rollers provided to the conveying route which are in contact with the surface of the cell material **W** that constitutes the inner peripheral surface when the cell material is wound on the supply roll **110**, i.e. the surface where the creases are concave. The cell material **W** in contact with the corrective roller **340** thereby bends in the opposite direction of the creases with a smaller radius of curvature than when the cell material is in contact with other rollers in contact with the opposite surface, and the creases in the cell material **W** are corrected.

In the corrective roller **340**, the fold-back angle, which is the difference between the angle of the cell material **W** entering the corrective roller **340** and the angle of the cell material **W** exiting the corrective roller **340**, is approximately 180 degrees. The fold-back angle is preferably between 90 degrees and 180 degrees inclusive, but the fold-back angle may be less than 90 degrees and may also exceed 180 degrees if the cell material **W** entering the corrective roller **340** and the

exiting cell material **W** do not interfere with each other. Increasing the fold-back angle as much as possible further improves the effect of correcting creases in the bent cell material **W**.

The cutting section **400** comprises receiving bases **410** for receiving the bottom surface of the cell material **W**, a suction-holding conveying section **420** for suction-holding and moving the cell material **W**, and an electrode punching section **430** for punching and cutting out a positive electrode **20** from the cell material **W**. Furthermore, the cutting section **400** comprises a suction-holding convey-out part **440** for suction-holding and conveying out the cut out positive electrode **20**, and a second imaging part **450**.

The suction-holding conveying section **420** comprises a suction-holding head **421** for exerting suction force by negative pressure due to being connected to a negative pressure supply source (not shown), the suction-holding head being installed on a robot hand (not shown) controlled by the controller **500** and being capable of moving.

The electrode punching section **430** comprises a cutting blade **431** that corresponds to the shape of the cut out positive electrode **20**, and a press device **432** controlled by the controller **500** to raise and lower the cutting blade **431**.

The suction-holding convey-out part **440** comprises a suction-holding head **441** for exerting suction force by negative pressure due to being connected to a negative pressure supply source (not shown), the suction-holding head being installed on a robot hand (not shown) controlled by the controller **500** and being capable of moving.

The second imaging part **450** is provided so as to be capable of observing the cell material **W** from above, and is capable of transmitting captured images to the controller **500**. In an image captured by the second imaging part **450**, active material parts **W1** and tab parts **W2** of the cell material **W** are distinguished (see FIG. 5), and are used in order to specify areas bonded by the automatic joining section **310** from differences in the lengths of the active material parts **W1** along the conveying direction. When an area bonded by the automatic joining section **310** is specified, the distance the cell material **W** is conveyed by the suction-holding convey-out part **440** is altered according to the specified conveying-directional length, and the following cell material **W** is cut out in the proper position. An electrode containing the area bonded by the automatic joining section **310** is removed in a subsequent step.

Next, the action of the conveyor **100** according to the present embodiment is described.

The conveyor **100** is usually used while the roll support base **210** on the moving base **221A** (or **221B**) is positioned in the connecting position **A2** and linked with the conveying section **300**, as shown in FIG. 9. At this time, the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** are positioned at the lower end, and the joining section first clamp **315**, the joining section second clamp **316**, and the buffer section clamp **323** are not fixing the cell material **W** in place. The cell material **W** extends from the roll support base **210**, through the automatic joining section **310**, the buffer section **320**, and the draw-out section **330**, to the cutting section **400**.

In the supply roll **110** of the roll support base **210**, the core **111** is rotatably held by the holding rollers **212**, and the core **111** is in contact with the braking rollers **231** of the brake force applying means **230**. The brake force of the braking rollers **231** is adjusted by the controller **500** in accordance with the distance to the supply roll **110** as detected by the roll detection means **240**. The brake force is adjusted so as to decrease as the cell material **W** of the supply roll **110** lessens.

In a state in which the cell material W is fixed in place by the draw-out section second clamp 334 and the cell material W is not fixed in place by the draw-out section first clamp 333 as shown in FIG. 10, the cell material is moved under the draw-out roller 332 positioned above, and the length of the conveying route is lengthened. At this time, the cell material W downstream of the draw-out roller 332 does not move due to being fixed in place by the draw-out section second clamp 334, and the cell material W is drawn out from the upstream supply roll 110 in accordance with the change in the conveying route length as shown in FIG. 11.

When the draw-out roller 332 reaches the lower end, the cell material W stops being drawn out from the supply roll 110. At this time, the supply roll 110 would continue to rotate due to inertial force, but because brake force is being applied by the brake force applying means 230, the rotation of the supply roll 110 stops simultaneously with the stopping of the movement of the draw-out roller 332. Specifically, the brake force applied by the brake force applying means 230 is set so as to stop the rotation of the supply roll 110 simultaneously with the stopping of the movement of the draw-out roller 332. Such brake force, which depends on the inertial moment of the supply roll 110, decreases as the cell material W is drawn out from the supply roll 110. Specifically, when the brake force is set so that the supply roll 110, having much newly-replaced cell material W wound thereon, stops simultaneously with the stopping of the draw-out roller 332, the brake force becomes excessive and pulling the cell material out becomes difficult when the cell material W has been drawn out and the inertial moment of the supply roll 110 has decreased. Conversely, when the brake force is set so that the supply roll 110, from which some amount of cell material W has been drawn out, stops simultaneously with the stopping of the draw-out roller 332, a newly replaced supply roll 110 will have a large inertial moment and brake force will be insufficient. When the brake force is insufficient, the rotation of the supply roll 110 does not stop even if the draw-out roller 332 stops, more cell material W than necessary is supplied, and the cell material W slackens. Therefore, the brake force is adjusted by the controller 500 in accordance with the distance to the supply roll 110 as detected by the roll detection means 240, whereby the brake force does not depend on changes in the inertial moment of the supply roll 110, and the supply roll 110 can be intermittently rotated in a satisfactory manner.

When the draw-out roller 332 reaches the lower end, the cell material W is fixed in place by the draw-out section first clamp 333, and the fixing of the cell material W by the draw-out section second clamp 334 is released, as shown in FIG. 12. The suction-holding conveying section 420 of the cutting section 400 holds the cell material W by suction, and the cell material W is moved in the conveying direction and disposed underneath the electrode punching section 430 (see FIG. 9). Because the draw-out section first clamp 333 is fixing the cell material W in place at this time, the cell material W upstream of the draw-out section first clamp 333 does not move, the conveying route length is shortened by the rising of the draw-out roller 332, and a predetermined length of cell material W is drawn out downstream from the conveying section 300, as shown in FIG. 14.

On the downstream side of the cutting section 400, creases are corrected so that the cell material W becomes nearly flat in a natural state with no tension, because of the corrective roller 340. The cell material W can thereby be suction-held in a satisfactory manner by the suction-holding conveying section 420, and the positive electrode 20 can be suction-held by the suction-holding convey-out part 440 in a satisfactory manner.

Next, the press device 432 is actuated, lowering the cutting blade 431, and the positive electrode 20 is cut out from the cell material W. The cutting blade 431 is then raised, the positive electrode 20 is held by suction by the suction-holding convey-out part 440, and the positive electrode 20 is conveyed out to the next step.

After the draw-out roller 332 has risen, the state shown in FIG. 10 is again enacted, wherein the cell material W is fixed in place by the draw-out section second clamp 334 and the cell material W is not fixed in place by the draw-out section first clamp 333. The draw-out roller 332 positioned above is again moved downward, and the cell material W is drawn out from the supply roll 110 upstream, in the same manner as described above. Thus, the actions of the draw-out roller 332, the draw-out section first clamp 333, and the draw-out section second clamp 334 are repeated in conjunction by the controller 500, whereby the cell material W can be intermittently drawn out in predetermined lengths, corresponding to the lengths of the cut out positive electrodes 20.

As the cell material W is repeatedly intermittently drawn out from the supply roll 110, the amount of cell material W on the supply roll 110 decreases. When the ending edge mark M of the cell material W reaches the imaging range of the first imaging part 317, the controller 500, which receives signals from the first imaging part 317, assesses that it is time to replace the supply roll 110, and activates the buffer section clamp 323 to fix the cell material W in place as shown in FIG. 14. Furthermore, the controller 500 activates the joining section first clamp 315 and the joining section second clamp 316 to fix the cell material W in place as shown in FIG. 16. The buffer section clamp 323 continues to fix the cell material W in place until the joining of the cell material W is complete in the automatic joining section 310. Therefore, it becomes impossible for the cell material W to be drawn out from the supply roll 110 even if the draw-out roller 332 of the draw-out section 330 is lowered, but the needed cell material W can be supplied from the buffer section 320 by raising the buffer rollers 322A, 322B to shorten the conveying route as shown in FIG. 15. The cutting out of positive electrodes 20 can thereby be continued without stopping in the cutting section 400 even when the supply roll 110 is replaced. Because there are two buffer rollers 322A, 322B provided in the present embodiment, a longer amount of cell material W can be supplied from the buffer section 320 than when there is one, and the time of replacing the supply roll 110 can continue longer.

While positive electrodes 20 continue to be cut out, the cell material W is cut by the cutting part 311 in the automatic joining section 310 in a state in which the cell material W is fixed in place by the joining section first clamp 315 and the joining section second clamp 316, as shown in FIG. 17. The fixing of the cell material W by the joining section first clamp 315 is then released as shown in FIG. 18, and the supply roll 110 can be replaced. The fixed state of the cell material W is maintained in the joining section second clamp 316.

Next, the braking rollers 231 are raised by the roller movement mechanism 232, and the moving base 221A positioned in the connecting position A2 is moved to the convey in/out position A1, as shown in FIG. 1. In the convey in/out position A1, another roll support base 210 having a new supply roll 110 installed waits after having been installed in another moving base 221B. Therefore, at the same time that the moving base 221A holding a used up supply roll 110 is moved to the convey in/out position A1, the moving base 221B holding a new supply roll 110 is moved to the connecting position A2, whereby the supply roll 110 can be replaced in a short amount of time.

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When the moving base **221B** holding a new supply roll **110** is positioned in the connecting position **A2**, the ending edge **Wf** of the pre-replacement old cell material **W** and the starting edge **Ws** of the post-replacement new cell material **W** are imaged by the first imaging part **317** as shown in FIG. **19**. The width-directional misalignment α of the starting edge **Ws** of the post-replacement cell material **W**, relative to the ending edge **Wf** of the pre-replacement cell material **W** as shown in FIG. **22(A)**, is specified by the controller **500**. The roll position correction means **250** is then activated to move the supply roll **110** in the axial direction, using the specified misalignment α as the correction amount. When the roll position correction means **250** activates, the upper support part **215** moveably supported by the linear guide **217** moves in the roll support base **210**, thereby moving the supply roll **110**. The width-directional position of the starting edge **Ws** of the post-replacement cell material **W** is thereby made to coincide with the ending edge **Wf** of the pre-replacement cell material **W**, as shown in FIG. **22(B)**.

When the width-directional position of the starting edge **Ws** of the post-replacement cell material **W** coincides with the ending edge **Wf** of the pre-replacement cell material **W**, the joining section first clamp **315** is activated to fix the starting edge **Ws** of the new cell material **W** in place, as shown in FIG. **19**. The bonding part **313** is then activated to affix and bond tape **T** between the ending edge **Wf** of the pre-replacement cell material **W** and the starting edge **Ws** of the post-replacement cell material **W**, as shown in FIGS. **20** and **22(C)**.

When the joining of the cell materials **W** together is complete, the fixing of the cell material **W** by the joining section first clamp **315** and the joining section second clamp **316** is released as shown in FIG. **21**, and the fixing of the cell material **W** by the buffer section clamp **323** is also released as shown in FIG. **23**. All fixing of the cell material **W** by the plurality of clamps provided between the supply roll **110** and the draw-out section **330** is thereby released, and the cell material **W** can be drawn out from the supply roll **110**.

The positive electrodes **20** are cut out in the cutting section **400** while the cell material **W** is repeatedly drawn out from the supply roll **110** by the draw-out section **330**, but during this time, the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B**, which have moved upward, are moved until they reach the lower end. The movement of the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** takes place over the course of multiple draw-out actions by the draw-out section **330**. Factors such as the time required and timing of the movement of the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** to the lower end are not particularly limited as long as the movement is complete by the time the next supply roll **110** is replaced.

When the area bonded by the automatic joining section **310** reaches the imaging range of the second imaging part **450**, the conveying-directional interval **L1** of an active material part **W1** is specified by the controller **500** from the captured image, as shown in FIG. **22(C)**. When an interval **L2** of an active material part including an area joined by the automatic joining section **310** is detected, the area is specified to be a joined area from the difference with the interval **L1**. According to the specified conveying-directional intervals **L1**, **L2**, the distance conveyed by the suction-holding convey-out part **440** is altered, and the following cell material **W** can be cut at the proper position. The portion including the area joined by the automatic joining section **310** is removed in a subsequent step.

In a subsequent step, a cut out positive electrode **20** is stacked on a negative electrode **30** with the separator **40** in between, constituting a stacked electrode assembly **11**.

As described above, the present embodiment comprises buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** that can lengthen and shorten the

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conveying route by changing positions, and a buffer section clamp **323** capable of securing the cell material **W** in place, the buffer section clamp being provided farther upstream along the direction in which the cell material is conveyed **W** than the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B**. With the cell material **W** secured by the buffer section clamp **323**, the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** change positions so as to shorten the conveying route. Therefore, when the supply roll **110** is replaced, the necessary cell material **W** can be supplied downstream from the buffer section **320**, the supply roll **110** can be replaced without stopping the equipment, and productivity can be improved.

The present embodiment also comprises a first imaging part **317** for detecting the cell material **W**, and a controller **500** for specifying the ending edge of the cell material **W** by means of a signal from the first imaging part **317** and securing the cell material **W** in place by means of the buffer section clamp **323**. Therefore, the time period for replacing the conveyor **100** can be automatically distinguished, and the supply roll can be automatically replaced.

The present embodiment comprises a draw-out section **330** for intermittently drawing out predetermined lengths of the cell material **W** by pulling the cell material, the draw-out section being provided downstream in the conveying direction from the buffer section **320** along the conveying route, and a pull-out section second clamp **334** for securing the cell material **W** in place when the draw-out section **330** draws out the cell material **W**, the pull-out section second clamp being provided downstream from the draw-out section **330**. Therefore, when the cell material **W** is drawn out from the supply roll **110** or the buffer section **320**, the cell material **W** can be secured by the pull-out section second clamp **334**, and the cell material **W** can be reliably conveyed downstream and not upstream.

Because the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** change positions so as to again lengthen the conveying route after the securing of the cell material **W** by the buffer section clamp **323** has been released, the supply roll **110** can be replaced many times without stopping the equipment, and productivity is improved.

Because the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** change positions so as to lengthen the conveying route throughout multiple draw-out actions repeated by the draw-out section **330**, the conveying route can be lengthened to continue the replacement time. Because the conveying route can be extended over a long period of time, the change in tension applied to the cell material **W** can be reduced as much as possible by lengthening the conveying route, and the drawing out and conveying of the cell material **W** can be maintained satisfactorily.

The supply roll **110**, which is rotatably held on the moveable roll support base **210**, can be replaced with each roll support base **210** after the cell material **W** is secured by the buffer section clamp **323**. Therefore, a new supply roll **110** can be set up in advance on the roll support base **210**, and productivity can be improved.

(Modifications)

The present invention is not limited to the embodiment described above, and can be modified as appropriate. For example, the cell need not be a secondary cell. The present invention may also be applied to the conveying of negative electrodes **30** or separators **40**, rather than the conveying of positive electrodes **20**.

The number of buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** may be one, or it may be three or more.

All of the rollers in contact with the cell material **W**, such as the buffer rollers **322A**, **322B** and the draw-out roller **332**, are capable of rotating, but non-rotatable members may be used

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in place of the rollers if their surfaces have low friction and allow the cell material W to slide smoothly over.

To assess the time period for replacing the supply roll 110, the time period may be assessed from the remaining amount of cell material W detected by the roll detection means 240 (detection means), or from the number of positive electrodes 20 that have been cut out, rather than observing the ending edge marks M of the cell material W.

The joining section first clamp 315 and the joining section second clamp 316 are provided to the automatic joining section 310, but another clamp may be provided to the roll support base 210 in place of the joining section first clamp 315 on the upstream side.

To apply brake force to the supply roll 110, a non-rotating member may be pushed against the core 111 and the brake force may be adjusted by adjusting the pushing force, instead of bringing the braking rollers 231 in contact with the core 111.

Instead of adjusting the brake force by the braking rollers 231 in accordance with the distance to the supply roll 110 as detected by the roll detection means 240, or in combination with this adjustment, the brake force may be adjusted with each draw-out action of the cell material W. Therefore, when the supply roll 110 begins to rotate from a stopped state, for example, rotating the supply roll 110 is made easier by either not applying brake force or making the brake force as small as possible, and the necessary brake force can be applied or increased after the supply roll 110 has begun to rotate.

The invention claimed is:

1. A conveyor comprising:

a supply roll rotatably arranged and configured to support a belt-shaped cell material for an electrode or a separator to intermittently feeding out the cell material by rotation of the supply roll;

a plurality of movement parts configured to lengthen and shorten a conveying route by conveyably holding the cell material fed out from the supply roll; and

a first securing device configured to secure the cell material, the first securing device being provided upstream from the movement parts along a direction in which the cell material is conveyed;

the movement parts changing position so as to shorten the conveying route in a state in which the cell material is secured by the first securing device and feed the cell material downstream from the moving part while the supply roll is replaced.

2. The conveyor according to claim 1, further comprising: a detection device arranged with respect to the conveying route to detect the cell material; and

a controller programmed to operate the first securing device to secure the cell material in place when an ending edge of the cell material is specified by a detection signal from the detection device.

3. The conveyor according to claim 1, further comprising: a draw-out section arranged with respect to the supply roll to intermittently draw out the cell material by pulling the cell material, the draw-out section being provided down-

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stream in the conveying direction from the movement parts along the conveying route; and

a second securing device configured to secure the cell material when the draw-out section draws out a predetermined length of cell material, the second securing section being provided downstream in the conveying direction from the draw-out section.

4. The conveyor according to claim 1, wherein the movement parts is configured to change position so as to again lengthen the conveying route after the securing of the cell material by the first securing section has been released.

5. The conveyor according to claim 4, wherein the movement parts is configured to change position so as to lengthen the conveying route throughout multiple draw-out actions repeated by the draw-out section.

6. The conveyor according to claim 1, wherein the supply roll is rotatably held on a moveable support base, and the supply roll can be replaced with each support base after the cell material has been secured by the first securing section.

7. A conveying method comprising:

feeding out and conveying a belt-shaped cell material from a supply roll on which the cell material is wound, the cell material being a material for an electrode or a separator; securing the cell material at a first location along in a conveying route of the cell material;

shortening the conveying route at a second location by changing positions of movement parts for conveyably holding the cell material farther downstream in a cell material conveying direction than the first location; and replacing the supply roll with a new supply roll of additional cell material while the cell material positioned on the movement parts is supplied downstream.

8. The conveying method according to claim 7, wherein the cell material is secured when an ending edge of the cell material is detected.

9. The conveying method according to claim 7, further comprising securing the cell material at a third location along the conveying route; and intermittently pulling the cell material from the supply roll at a fourth location that is upstream from the third location in the cell material conveying direction.

10. The conveying method according to claim 7, further comprising lengthening the conveying route by changing the positions of the movement parts after the securing of the cell material at the first location has been released.

11. The conveying method according to claim 10, wherein the lengthening of the conveying route is carried throughout repeated multiple cell material draw-out actions.

12. The conveying method according to claim 7, wherein the replacing of the supply roll after the cell material has been secured at the first location, and the replacing of the supply roll is carried out with each moveable support base for rotatably holding the supply roll.

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